

Mary's Song (1)

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[0 : 01] Now let's turn our minds this morning for a short time to Luke chapter 1 and in that passage we read, we're looking today at the passage beginning at verse 46.

And Mary said, There are three passages that are quite often referred to as the songs of these two chapters of Luke.

We saw Simeon's song last time when we looked in chapter 2 at how Simeon, in taking the infant Jesus up in his arms in verse 28 to 32, proclaimed these great words that we looked at last time.

And there's also Zechariah's prophecy, as you find also in chapter 2 from verse 68 down to verse 79. The first one of the three songs that are called songs sometimes is this one of Mary's.

Mary said, And Mary's song is a wonderful expression, not only of her own faith and her trust and her acceptance of what God is doing in her life now that he's revealed himself to her.

[1 : 41] And he did so by the angel, especially as we read. But it's also a wonderful drawing together of various strands in the Old Testament, which Mary draws into her praise of God.

And that, of course, is so appropriate because what she's singing about is the fact that she is bearing a child who is going to be the savior of the world.

And the Old Testament is so full of promises about this coming savior. And it took all of these centuries for these promises to be fulfilled.

And it's understandable that Mary is rejoicing, not only because she herself has found such favor from the Lord, but because in the child that she's carrying, all of these great promises, all of these great facts from the Old Testament, all the things that God had done in preparation for this moment have now come to fulfillment and fruition in the child that she is going to bring into the world.

And the passage has very similar, has many similarities, I should say, to the likes of Hannah's song. You remember Hannah in verse Samuel when she prayed to God in times of Eli, who was overlooking the things of the temple, and she prayed for a child and the child Samuel that she then bore was given to the Lord and served, as you know, in the temple, and then came to be a great leader in Israel.

[3 : 13] Well, if you look at Hannah's song and just compare it when you have a moment later on today, perhaps compare Hannah's song with Mary's song. And you'll find the very close similarities between them, not only in the words they use, the expressions they use, the form of the song, but also the occasion, of course, is to do with the birth of a child, or with the conceiving of a child is going to be important in the history of God's people.

Another thing that's very prominent in the song, and it's something we saw when we went through the Gospel of Luke some time ago, it is that Mary gives prominence to God's care for the poor.

God's care for the outcast, God's care for the lowest in society, God's care for those who are poor, especially in the sense of casting their care upon Him, in contrast to the proud, to the arrogant, to the godless, to the ungodly.

Mary gives prominence to that throughout the song, how He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent empty away.

And it's not so much in terms of physical poverty, though that's included in it, or financial, economic poverty, though that's not absent from it, is to do especially with one's attitude and relationship with God.

[4 : 42] Who are the proud? Who are the arrogant? Who are the rich? In Mary's song, well, they are those who live without God, who reject God, who are contrary to the ways of the Lord and how they live.

Who are the poor? Who are the humble? They are those who have come to accept God, those who have come to live in dependence upon God, those who don't have many of the resources of this world, and yet they have all the resources that God has so abundantly given us in His salvation.

So bear that in mind as we come today to look through this song of Mary. We're going to look at the first few verses this morning, and this evening we'll look at the final part of it, and especially how Mary reveals certain of God's great attributes to us as she praises Him in these words.

Well, firstly, two things this morning, and we're looking firstly at how Mary is occupied in praising God, especially as verse 47, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

That's the first thing. She's occupied in praising the Lord. So this is in fact a song about God. Mary has a lot to say about herself.

[6 : 02] She has things to say, as we said, about the poor, about those who are of high minds and reject God. She has a lot to say about these kind of people. She has a lot to say about herself, and how God has blessed her, and how even all generations from now on, she says, will call me blessed.

But her song is not about herself. Her song is about God. Her rejoicing is about God. Her rejoicing is in God. Her triumph is in God.

She's not presenting herself through the song. She is actually presenting her God. And however famous she is going to become, and however renowned she's going to become, as Elizabeth calls her in the previous passage, the mother of my Lord.

A remarkable thing, as we saw last week. A remarkable position given to Mary, that she would be the woman who would actually bring the Son of God incarnate into the world to be the Savior of sinners.

And yet it's God that she magnifies. It's God that she wishes to make great in her song of praise. And that's really what praise does for us and in us.

[7 : 22] Praise is, as God has appointed it, such an important aspect of our worship. We praise the Lord privately, but we praise the Lord congregational.

When we come together to worship, it would be exceedingly wrong to leave out of our worship any items of praise or praise to God. Imagine a service without praise, without singing of praise.

It would not be at all fitting, because not only would it not be in accordance with what God has revealed a service of worship should be and should contain, but it would leave out something of immense importance to ourselves from this point of view, that it is praise that takes you out of yourself.

When you praise the Lord, you're looking out of yourself to Him. And if you don't praise the Lord, and that's one of the things, sadly, that you have to say about lives that today don't live in a way that praises God, the many millions of lives in the world, in our own nation, and around us in our communities as well, that do not praise God, that never engage in the praise of God, whether privately or publicly, you can say that living in a way that does not praise God is the ultimate selfie.

You know what a selfie is? A selfie is a word that's been coined for these, what you get in your mobile phone, now use your camera, you point it in on yourself, especially if somebody famous is beside you or in the background, you want a selfie with these people, you want a selfie so that you can then put it up on Facebook or wherever, and that means that you've made it, you've actually had your photograph taken along with George Clooney or whoever, and there it is, for everybody to see, it's a selfie.

[9 : 20] And even famous people do selfies with other famous people or with people that they don't think is famous but still want to be photographed with. That's not what I'm really going into, but not praising God is the ultimate selfie because the lens of your life is then pointed in on yourself.

Whereas praise is when your camera is away from yourself, and when however much you're involved in yourself in praise as you are, the ultimate focus is upon God, upon the worthiness of God, upon the virtues of God, upon all the attributes that God has revealed in your relationship with Him that makes Him worthy of your praise.

And you see, that's what's happening with Mary. She is praising God, and as she praises God, so she's turning away from herself. Her soul is turning upwards, out of herself, towards this God.

My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.

And that's one of the sad things about Christmas. We're not here to spoil people's fun and genuine joy and rejoicing and having good times in a proper way, but the commercialization of Christmas, the taking of Christmas and making it into a big business sort of thing, the way in which Christmas has been turned in that way so that maximum profit can be made out of it financially, economically, or whatever.

[11 : 06] What is that doing? It's turning the lens again in on ourselves as human beings, isn't it? It's really, in a sense, part of this ultimate selfie, where instead of looking out in praise to God, you are actually worshipping the gods of commerce, the gods of materialism, the gods that have been made by human hands for human satisfaction and very often out of human greed.

And that's what Mary is the opposite of. And that's for us, for what for us Christmas should be about as well.

Nothing wrong with gifts. Nothing wrong with having a good time and family time. Nothing wrong with enjoying all the things that we are given to enjoy in the providence of God.

But let's have the lens always towards God. Let's always be able to say with Mary, my soul, magnifies the Lord. And of course, that word magnifies is important, isn't it?

Because when you're taking a selfie or any camera shot at all, you can focus in and you can zoom in. And you can actually bring the object of whatever you're actually photographing or taking a snap of, you can bring it closer.

[12 : 29] You can actually that way make it a bit bigger than it actually appears at first sight. The camera lens can actually draw it closer and make it bigger for you. Well, that's what praise does.

Because to many people out there, God is just so small and so insignificant and so irrelevant to modern life. And you and I are in the business of being worshippers of God, praises of God.

And what do we do in praising God? We make God great. We magnify the Lord. We present Him in a way that shows Him up in all His features as worthy of people's attention and worthy of people's faith and trust in Him.

My soul magnifies the Lord. My soul makes Him great. My soul gives an enlargement of Him, if you like.

Is that the ethos? Is that the aim? Is that the purpose of my life today? Of your life today? Is this what Christmas has been for us this particular year or any particular year?

[13 : 45] Is this what we're looking forward to, God willing, in a new year? A year that gives us further opportunities to make the Lord great, to magnify the Lord, to bring about further enlargements of God for people to take notice of.

That's what Mary's song is about. It's a song about God. And as it's a song about God, it's a song for magnifying the Lord.

But then secondly, as she's occupied in praising God, it's a song from the soul. You see what she's saying here? My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

She's praising the Lord. She's rejoicing in the Lord from deep within herself. Now it uses the two words here soul and spirit and there have been volumes written on what the difference if any there is in the way the Bible uses the word soul and the way it uses spirit.

And I'm not going to go into that just now. We're not going to try and philosophize and try and make a distinction because very often there isn't much of a distinction anyway in the way the Bible uses it.

[14 : 57] But if you want to make a distinction then it's something like this. When she says my soul magnifies the Lord, she's talking about that which is other than physical about oneself.

Your soul is that which is the non-physical part of you. I couldn't speak, you couldn't speak, you couldn't think, you couldn't formulate opinions, you couldn't come to decisions without having a non-physical part to you.

That's what you call your soul in contrast to your body. And that's how we were created. God created us physically, then he breathed into us and we became a living soul.

We became a being that has a spiritual side to us as well as a physical. So it's not improper to say you have a soul and you have a body, although it's better to say you are a spiritual being with a soul and a body.

When it uses the word spirit, sometimes in the Bible that's used to emphasize where the soul is in relationship with God or if you like the fact that in our spiritual side we have been made for communion with God.

[16 : 23] So it's not in a sense different to your soul but it's emphasizing the fact that in your soul, in your spiritual side, within what is spiritual of you, though it doesn't leave out your use of the body of course, but within your spiritual side, it's within that which is spiritual that praise of God begins.

It's from that that it issues out. And when it's using the word spirit, it really is emphasizing the fact that we have been made for God. we have been made for a higher life than any animals around us or any other aspect of God's creation.

It's what makes human beings different to every other form of life that we have been made to enjoy communion with God.

A communion restored to us by Christ. A communion that we're lost in the fall that our sin actually broke and interrupted and yet Jesus came into the world to restore and it's restored when you come to have this Jesus in your life.

When he comes to occupy your soul, when the Holy Spirit comes back into your soul, into your life, then you become this spirit, this spirit part of you, then can rejoice in communion with God.

[17 : 48] And that's what Mary is saying. My soul magnifies the Lord and in my spirit I'm rejoicing in God my Savior. Whatever you find in human philosophy and in scientific analysis to say and to suggest to you in contrast to the Bible of human origin and human descent.

And remember when we say these things, we're not decrying science. science is always rubbish. We're not saying science is always in opposition to scripture.

We're not saying that science has no business alongside of or beneath scripture. We're not saying in any way that people should not become scientists or Christians should not become scientists or that science itself is something with which Christians should have nothing to do at all.

Some of the greatest men in the world were Christian scientists and are to this day. But the point is this. Apes don't praise God. Chimps don't praise God.

Monkeys don't praise God. Baboons don't praise God. They don't have the capacity. Why don't they have the capacity? Because they don't have a soul.

[19 : 04] Because God has not given them spirit the way he has given to human beings to be able in their spirit and their soul to magnify the Lord to rejoice in God as their savior.

That's your privilege today. That's your great privilege. That's your great distinctive as a human being compared to every other form of life.

That's something for which daily we should be thankful to God. That he has made us for himself. That he has made us for communion for fellowship with himself.

That he has created us in such a way as given us in our soul the capacity, the faculties by which we are able to know him, to love him, to listen to him, to hear his voice, to speak to him, to praise him, to pray to him, and so on.

that's Mary's song from the soul. She rejoices in God her savior. She's occupied then in the praising of God.

[20 : 23] Secondly, she is presenting God in her praise. And that involves two things. We'll see more of that this evening. But look first of all at how she presents the way God has acted toward her and indeed towards others as well.

Where she says, for he has looked upon the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. And all the way through from there you have Mary referring to something that God commonly does or that God is commonly seen to do.

What is it? Well, it is that this is in fact God's usual method of operation or procedure. He doesn't take the people in this world that think they are the most important people.

He doesn't people that seem in the eyes of society to be the most important and the most influential people that ever lived or are of their generation.

He takes the despised. He takes the lowly. He takes the people who are deemed to be little or to be worthless even. After all, if you were going to choose a person, who would be the mother of the Son of God incarnate, you wouldn't choose a poor shepherd girl from a backwater area of the world who is pregnant and not yet married, would you?

[22 : 02] God that's what God did. And that's how God operates. Because God is not concerned about what human beings think of themselves or of their fellow human beings.

He is concerned about what they come to know of Him and think of Him and realize is true of Him. And God acts according to His own principles.

And His own principles are very often designed to confound the thinking of those who think as human beings that they are great. All you've got to do is read the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians where Paul is dealing with this gospel of Jesus Christ.

This gospel that contains at his very basis the person of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This gospel, this account, this message that so often laughed at, was laughed at in Paul's day, was ridiculed and Paul's day was set aside in Paul's day as absolutely not worth putting alongside the philosophies of the great Rome and the Greece that was before Rome and the other great civilizations that existed in the world.

You don't take something like the gospel, people said to Paul, and think that it fits into the category of these great thoughts. No, says Paul, it doesn't.

[23 : 26] You put it above them. because it's God's wisdom which human beings speak of as foolishness.

Well, Paul says, okay, accept the word foolishness just for argument's sake. And this foolishness of God, he says, in the gospel that promotes Christ in his death and resurrection is wiser than men and greater than men.

And that's what God is about and that's what God is like and that's what God is doing. He is choosing, constantly choosing, down through the centuries, the least likely and what in fact is most calculated to offend our human pride.

You look at Mary and your human pride is offended, isn't it? That this person should actually be chosen by God to actually bear his own son incarnate and give birth to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And anyway, why this poor girl? And why not leave her pregnancy till after she was married? Why didn't God do that?

[24 : 46] As he could well have done. Because he's God. Because he uses methods that just shatter our human pride and our human sense of self-superiority, even in regard to the ways of God.

And that too affects our Christmas times. we have made Christmas as human beings very nice.

We parcel it up. We have glitz and glamour. And these things in themselves are not necessarily wrong. But they are wrong when they obscure reality and the reality of what this Christmas time is supposed to represent.

Because actually it wasn't very pretty. A poor girl, betrothed but not married and pregnant and her man Joseph, minded as Matthew tells us, to put her away secretly because people were obviously offended about it.

And then nowhere even comfortable, let alone grand for her to bring her child into the world. That's not nice. it's actually quite ugly.

[26 : 16] But it's God's way. And amongst all the niceness of Christmas, don't forget that Christ was born in an outhouse.

Don't forget that he was born to a poor mother. don't forget that he was born in ignominy and shame. Don't forget that he knew that before he came.

That that was his lot in the world. And when we think of the homeless as we must do at Christmas time, and when sometimes our own comforts and our nicely dressed parcels, and our gifts and all that we have in abundance in our home, and the amount of food that we are given by God to enjoy, when all of these things make us sometimes forget that there are people on our streets, and people without much to feed themselves by, whatever has been the cause of that we're not taking to do with.

The fact is it exists. When we're thinking of all of that and when it's obscured by the amount of abundance and plenty that we have at Christmas time, don't let it obscure this fact that the Son of God became poor for our sakes, that we through his poverty might become rich.

And that's really what Mary is saying. It's God's choice to confound human wisdom that is so often the mark of his ways.

[28 : 04] And that's a lesson to us all the time, isn't it? When we're thinking of God and of how he acts and of the world in which we live. Mary's God is presented in her praise.

And he's the God who very often does the opposite of what we might expect, of what we would think best. Christ. And it falls through into every aspect of human experience.

Some very painful and very difficult for us. But that is God. It's our privilege to worship him and praise him as Mary did.

But you'll see this praise comes from Mary's experience. Finally, it comes from her experience. It's my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices. Actually, in the Greek text of the verse there, it's my spirit rejoiced, literally.

It's a past tense, in God, my Savior. And that's saying something very precious to us. Not only is Mary presently rejoicing, and her rejoicing is certainly ongoing and rejoicing, but it's something that she also does in relation to the past, especially the announcement that the angel brought to her, that she would have this child, that this child would be great, that he would be called Jesus, he would be great, and will be called a son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

[29 : 42] Amazing words, that could only be true, of the promised Messiah, and here is this poor servant girl, and she is being told, you are the person that God has chosen for this occasion, and she accepted this, let it be so, she said in verse 38, behold I am the servant of the Lord, let it be so to me according to your word, and the angel departed from her, she didn't say, oh I'm not worthy of that, she didn't say, no I think it should be somebody else, please let it be somebody else, this was God's word to her, however unlikely it seemed to herself, because it was God's word to her, she accepted it there and then, and then she broke out into this song, when it came to this occasion, that she magnified the Lord, and her spirit rejoiced in God her servant, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant, in other words, it's from her experience of God in her life, of God coming into her life, her experience of God's word, working in her soul, bring the truth to her mind, and her acceptance of that, it's all of that, as you put it together, that forms the basis, the root, of Mary's praise, in other words, we can only praise

God from an experience of God for ourselves, we can praise God outwardly in a form of praise, yes, but remember what Mary is saying, my soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior, for Mary praise is not formality, not mere formality, for Mary praise is not an outward shell without anything really of substance or spiritual truth in the very heart of it, for Mary praise is something that rises from your experience of God, from your spiritual experience of God, which is why she is saying, my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior, Savior, I think she's speaking of God as the God who has brought her to this moment, the God who has brought her into this position of bearing this child, it could be the case that she's actually speaking of the very child that she's carrying when she's saying she's rejoicing in

God, her Savior, Savior, because the word Savior, at least whether it's God in the other sense or God in the sense in which she's carrying the Son of God in her womb, whatever we make of it, it's certainly God my Savior, Mary is not sinless, Mary was not immaculate, Mary was not someone who didn't need salvation herself, she acknowledges that in the very phrase she's using, as she magnifies, so she rejoices, and as she rejoices, she rejoices in God, her Savior.

What is our praise today? What is your praise? Surely it's more than just what you're used to partaking of.

Surely it's more than just an outward church service. Surely it's more than just a forum where you've been accustomed to using the words of psalms that we sing in praise, words that we use in songs of praise to God.

[33 : 36] Surely it's from deep within us, from a deep experience of God. Surely it's from your soul, from your spirit, within yourself, from your saving experience of God, that you bring forth this praise today that magnifies the Lord and rejoices in God, your Savior.

You know, this word rejoice is a word that's very strong. We've come across it many times in the Bible. It's a word that means great rejoicing. It's used in verse 44.

It's used also in chapter 2 and at verse 10 where you find there unto you the angels saying, I bring you good news of great joy.

The announcement of the birth of a Savior when the angels announced that to the shepherds. And that word is the word Mary uses here.

She is rejoicing in God. She's exulting in God. She actually deep within her soul knows this great sense of joy and fulfillment and satisfaction.

[34 : 48] Is that how it is with you? Is your soul satisfied this Christmas with this Savior? With this child?

With this man, Christ Jesus? I can imagine and we can imagine that many eyes were very wide opened on Christmas morning, many children's eyes, and that as they opened their presents there were many gasps of astonishment, gasps of joy, gasps of surprise, gasps of satisfaction as the presents are opened.

Well, what Mary is saying to us is that that's how it should always be for us with regard to Jesus. As we unwrap him, if you like, in the teaching of the gospel, it should be with open eyes.

It should be with eyes of amazement that God has done such a thing. It should be with eyes of rejoicing, eyes of fulfillment, eyes of rejoicing and magnifying the Lord.

It should be with a gasp of astonished praise that God should have done such a thing for me. Let's pray.

[36 : 22] Lord, we do thank you for all that is bound up in the person of your son, for all that is bound up in his coming into this world as a human being.

we bless you, Lord, today for the reality of that incarnation. We thank you for everything that is following from it in the ministry of this person.

Oh, bless us, we pray today, for we know that we have come to the substance of the gospel, to Jesus Christ himself, to the glory of his person, to the shame and ignominy of his time and ministry in this world.

We bless you, oh, Lord, that in all of that, your thought was upon the salvation of sinners. We pray today that you would help us to continue to rejoice and to praise you and to rejoice in you.

Hear us, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.